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Ready for Iraq
MPs from Baumholder, Hanau and Darmstadt hone their skills in Grafenwöhr in preparation for upcoming deployment. See pages 14 and 15.



Fasching fun
People let their hair down during the Giessen Fasching Parade. See page 21 for a look at more Fasching fun in Seligenstadt.



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Herald Union



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News flash

LES changes

Leave and Earning Statements for all service members and Defense Department civilians, and paychecks for military retirees now have more protection from identity theft. The Defense Finance and Accounting Service has dropped the first five digits of a person's Social Security number from all pay statements and checks. Reports of identity theft have substantially increased in recent years, according to Federal Trade Commission officials. The change does not apply to electronic copies of statements found on the <https://mypay.dfas.mil> website. (DFAS News Release)

Reserve units home

Two Army Reserve units based in Wiesbaden returned home after serving more than a year on active duty in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Soldiers and family members of the 309th Rear Area Operations Center and 317th RAOC were presented with awards and certificates recognizing their service and sacrifice. The units will demobilize this month. Both units began serving in Iraq during the onset of the war. "The 7th Army Reserve Command family and the entire nation are proud of what these Soldiers have accomplished and are glad that they are all safely home," said Brig Gen. Richard M. Tabor, commander of the 7th Army Reserve Command. (7th ARCOM News Release)



Photo by Lt. Col. Jon Dahms
Sgt. 1st Class Kevin Haimovici is awarded the Bronze Star for his service in Iraq.



Photos by Jayme Loppnow

Soldiers keep on rolling home

Spc. Damian Bujanda, 320th Engineer Company, 565th Engineer Battalion, 130th Engineer Brigade, gets a hug from his wife Cora after returning from Iraq to Hanau with his unit Feb. 19. Photo right: Excited family members wave flags as buses carrying their loved ones pull up. Soldiers and units have been rolling in from Operation Iraqi Freedom throughout the 104th Area Support Group. See inside for more homecomings.

Army alters enlistment lengths

Change aimed at supporting force stabilization

By Sgt. 1st Class Marcia Triggs

Army News Service

Basic and Advanced Individual Training will be counted in addition to the number of years a new recruit enlists as part of a new force stabilization initiative.

There are 19 jobs, mainly combat-arm specialties, which fall under the recently implemented Variable Enlistment Length program.

Under VEL, Soldiers can enlist for three to six years. After arriving at their first unit, they are stabilized for at least three years.

Since its implementation in December more than 2,000 Soldiers have enlisted under VEL.

A smaller number of troops have enlisted under the congressionally mandated 15-month pilot program, National Call to Service. Since it was approved Oct. 1, about 125

Soldiers have enlisted in the Army under the program. Similarly to VEL, the program doesn't include training as part of the time-in-service contract and only a limited number of specialties fall under it.

National Call to Service was adopted by each of the other services. The 15-month pilot program coincides with VEL because they both kicked off about the same time, said Lt. Col. Harry Garner, chief of

Enlisted Accessions Division. They both keep initial-term Soldiers stabilized at their first duty station, but the National Call to Service is not a part of the Army's stabilization plans, Garner said.

The mission of force stabilization is to provide ready, deployable, combat forces. To do that units have to be manned, said Col. Michael Harris, deputy director of the Directorate of Military Personnel Policy, G1. However VEL isn't

See Enlistment on page 4

Driver's testing: ASG/BSB team to provide services for Soldiers in Iraq and Kuwait

By Karl Weisel
104th Area Support Group Public Affairs Office

Not everyone serving in Iraq with a Germany-based unit had the time or opportunity to obtain a U.S. Army Europe driver's license before deploying.

While transportation officials cannot issue USAREUR Certificates of License outside of Ger-

many, a team of 104th Area Support Group specialists will soon be deploying to Kuwait and Iraq to help Soldiers complete the testing portion before returning to their home station.

Successful completion of the test will provide the applicant with a license to operate a non-tactical vehicle.

"Basically what we're doing is

going down to Iraq to provide driver's testing," said Tommy Harrison, chief of plans and operations for the 104th ASG's Directorate of Logistics. "We want to give those Soldiers who did not have the opportunity to get their license before they left the country a chance to take the test."

A team of five to six driver's testing specialists from the 104th

ASG's base support battalions will deploy to Balad, Iraq, and Kuwait. "During their processing time at those staging areas, the Soldiers will have the opportunity to take the test," said Harrison.

"Once they return to Germany they can simply submit their \$10 check or money order, take the eye test and attend the two-hour orien-

See Testing on page 3

Commentary

Second thoughts

Coping with contrasts as Iraq mission continues

Commentary by Karl Weisel
104th Area Support Group Public Affairs Office

Like the living conditions coalition forces found upon their entry into Iraq, the past several weeks have been marked by dramatic contrasts.

As community populations throughout the 104th Area Support Group have swelled with men and women returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom, the contrasts have been reflected in everything from the mingling of the different colored uniforms to the mood swings of people coping with the emotional tumult of reunions and separation from friends made while enforcing a turbulent peace in a most foreign land.

The broad smiles and anxious preparations by young and old alike have told the story for weeks. "Dad will be home soon. ... I spoke to my Mom on the phone last week and I bought her a present. ... I can't wait to hold my wife in my arms again. ..."

As community members have ecstatically welcomed home friends and loved ones, others continue to serve in a dangerous part of the world counting down the days until their own homecomings.

Still more are in the process of honing their skills before departing for missions which will put them in harm's way.

During training in Grafenwöhr in February Military Police men and women from the Baumholder, Darmstadt and Hanau communities polished their Soldier skills while gearing up for duty in Iraq. Young men and women tackled the challenges of going on patrol with eyes and ears peeled for any sign of potential harm in the way of rocket propelled grenades, improvised explosive devices or any other suspicious behavior which might indicate a threat to their and the local population's well-being.

Targets hidden in the snow-covered meadows and forests of Grafenwöhr's huge training area simulated potential threats. As the Soldiers navigated their HMMWVs through a marked course they made every effort to maintain their vigilance while attempting to distinguish between targets

indicating armed assailants and those representing unarmed civilians. In live fire exercises on the frozen trails of Grafenwöhr the MPs made life-or-death decisions knowing that soon they would be making those choices for real in the blazing heat of Iraq.

When interviewed they all spoke proudly about the opportunity to put their training and Soldier skills into practice in a real-world situation. Their leaders beamed with pride and were quick with words of praise for the "unbelievable spirit" of their men and women, their willingness to perform whatever mission they would be charged to do and their ability to "get the job done."

In the background of the excitement over homecomings and upcoming deployment have been the never-ending reports of both good and bad news from Iraq. While schools and power stations continue to be repaired, large numbers of Iraq's citizens have found new forms of employment and casualties have been reduced — almost daily explosions continue to rock the fragile peace.

Also quietly under the radar of public attention, some families have suffered more than others the pangs of prolonged separation. Almost everyone knows at least one Army family that has come undone during the year-long deployment. Separation for some has meant a widening chasm in a relationship that may not have been that sound before the deployment. The knowledge that serving one's country sometimes demands more than some families can bear makes the collective joy of homecoming bittersweet at times.

There are contrasts — between the frozen lakes of Grafenwöhr and the scorching sands of Iraq, between the expressions of relief by the vast majority of Iraq's citizens at the toppling of a ruthless dictator and the ongoing efforts by a ruthless minority to drive the coalition out of Iraq.

Here's hoping that those who are preparing to go into harm's way remain safe and that those who regard life with such disregard and contempt disappear from the earth soon.

Bell sends: Keep Soldiers safe on European roads

By Gen. B.B. Bell
U.S. Army Europe commander

Tragedy can strike at any time. Two weeks ago a U.S. Army Europe Soldier who had just returned home after spending a year in Iraq was killed in a single-car accident while off duty. The investigation determined the driver of the car, in which the Soldier was a passenger, failed to negotiate a curve. The car crashed through a guardrail, rolled down a hill and came to rest on its roof, crushing the Soldier's skull. The driver had been drinking.

This accident underscores the risks this command faces as large numbers of USAREUR Soldiers redeploy from Iraq to the central region after long deployments. The two greatest concerns are Soldiers driving on European roads and driving while intoxicated.

Returning Soldiers may no longer be familiar with driving in Europe. Others may have deployed to Iraq shortly after arriving in theater, without having much opportunity to drive or to get a USAREUR driver's license. The risk of these Soldiers being involved in an accident is high and increases dramatically when they choose to drive after having a drink or two. Leaders must be actively involved in preventing vehicular accidents.

Leader involvement alone, however, is not enough. All Soldiers, civilians and family

members can and must be involved in accident prevention. A new program initiated by Combined Joint Task Force 7 provides an opportunity for such involvement.

This program, called Operation Guardian Angel, encourages families and friends to adopt a returning Soldier and serve as the Soldier's "safety net." Through this program, "guardian angels" provide for safety oversight and help ensure Soldiers safely return to duty following block leave or rest and recuperation. Everyone is strongly encouraged to participate in this program or start one similar to it; it can save lives.

Reintegration is both difficult and challenging. Our main challenge during this time is to ensure the well-being and safety of our Soldiers. Leaders, especially rear detachment commanders, can help keep Soldiers safe by concentrating on the execution of tasks outlined in the USAREUR Reintegration Model.

As we thank our returning Soldiers for their contributions and individual sacrifices, we must remind them to practice safety at home. We must ensure they are aware of the risks involved when driving on European roads and particularly the dangers of driving while intoxicated. Do not let a tragedy happen on your watch. We must do everything we possibly can to prevent another death as we execute Any Mission, Anywhere.

'Inspiring hope, possibility'

Commentary by K.C. Bertling
Special to the Herald Union

The theme of this year's Women's History Month is "Women Inspiring Hope and Possibility." American military communities are celebrating the hope and sense of possibility that comes from the inspirational work of women in the past, present and the future during the month of March.

Hope comes in many forms and sizes — laws challenged and changed, new medical discoveries, stories of compassion and courage, women standing tall against great odds and defending the country side by side with men. Many women of the 20th century may not have even ever considered how much their contributions have influenced America's history.

The work of women in sustaining the American Spirit is evident in every community around the world, especially where American forces are stationed. Their efforts are obvious in every aspect of efforts to enhance the quality of life.

Community spouses clubs in the 104th Area Support Group are no different than those of other communities in the world.

They may differ in size, but all have common goals of offering social activities for everyone and working tirelessly to organize fundraiser activities to raise money for scholarships and community support.

Just like women of the past, women today make a difference in the lives of others and support the nation through their dedicated efforts in the military and in support of service members everywhere.

Although most spouses club members are women, men are also always welcome to join and get involved.

A whole new world of people, ideas and events awaits potential members. This year as Women's History Month is celebrated, the Wiesbaden Community Spouses Club, along with neighboring communities of the 104th ASG, invite everyone to learn more about efforts to improve life for all and ongoing multicultural events.

On behalf of military community spouses clubs around the world, members of the Wiesbaden Community Spouses Club say, "Thank you America for recognizing and celebrating the important contributions of women pioneering the future."

Women's History Month

Registered to vote yet? Visit the Federal Voting Assistance Program website at www.fvap.gov for a federal postcard application and more information.

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News and features

News flash

New uniform flag policy

All Soldiers must now wear the U.S. flag insignia on the right shoulder of their utility uniform. Army Chief of Staff Gen. Peter Schoomaker approved the uniform item Feb. 11, and all Soldiers have until Oct. 1, 2005, to get the insignia sewn on their uniforms. The only ones authorized for wear on the uniform are the reverse field flag in red, white and blue. Subdued flags and those in other colors are in violation of U.S. code. Individuals should comply with Army Regulation 670-1, Wear and Appearance of the Army Uniform and Insignia. Nothing has changed regarding placement of the flag. It is sewn a half inch below the shoulder seam. If a combat patch is also placed on the right shoulder, the flag is sewn one-eighth of an inch below the combat patch. (AAFES News Release)

Medical fact sheets available online

Various medical fact sheets including information on everything from emergency care to benefits while traveling are available online courtesy of Tricare Europe at www.europe.tricare.osd.mil/main/PAO/factsheet.asp. A new sheet, "Reintegration Tips," provides information for military members and their families. (Tricare-Europe Public Affairs)

Avoid money transfer scams

The 104th Area Support Group's Security Office advises all employees to beware of the so-called "4-1-9" or "Advance Fee Fraud" schemes. The perpetrators of the scheme, known internationally as "4-1-9" fraud after the section of the Nigerian penal code which addresses fraud schemes, are often creative and innovative, according to a U.S. State Department warning. The schemes may include: • an individual or company receiving a letter, email or fax from an alleged official representing a foreign government or agency; • an offer to transfer millions of dollars into your personal bank account; • advance fees to process the transaction; • helping convert money from another country. Security officials advise all people approached by any suspicious con of this nature to ignore the request immediately and to contact their local Provost Marshal or Security Office if they have follow-on questions.

Partnership seminars in Berlin

The German Armed Forces Academy for Leadership and Civic Education hosts German-American partnership seminars at Berlin-Stausberg Sept. 27 to Oct. 1 for officers (O1-3) and Oct. 18-22 for noncommissioned officers (E6-9). The seminars will address the mission and structure of the German armed forces, trans-Atlantic relations, public opinions on German foreign and security policies, German history and more. It is not open to civilians. Call the 104th Area Support Group Public Affairs Office at mil 322-1400 or civ (06181) 88-1400 for more information. (USAREUR Public Affairs)

Army seeks health care professionals

The Army Medical Department is inviting all health care professionals to join their ranks. Of 13 professions covered by direct hire authority, those needed in greatest numbers are physicians, registered nurses, physician assistants, licensed practical nurses and diagnostic radiological technologists. Others sought are dentists, dental assistants, dental hygienists, dental lab technicians, pharmacists, podiatrists, audiologist/speech pathologists and optometrists. Call 1-800-633-3646 for more information. (Army Medicine News Service)



Photo by Dennis Johnson

The smiles tell the story

Spc. Francisco Irizarry, 485th Corps Support Battalion, gets a warm welcome from his son Francisco (from left), age 3, wife Wanda and daughter Eva Marie, age 2, at Hutier Kaserne Feb. 24. Members of the 485th CSB arrived back in Hanau at 9:30 pm. after returning from their nearly yearlong mission in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Know the rules for selling over the Internet in Germany

Internet auctions can be a great way to get rid of unwanted things in your storage room, but Soldiers and civilians must realize customs, tax and postal regulations apply when you sell things over the Internet in Germany.

"For U.S. military members, U.S. civilian employees or family members in Germany, selling goods over the Internet on a regular basis to make a profit is complicated," said Bill Johnson, chief of the U.S. Army Europe Customs Executive Agency Services Branch.

He noted that using the Army Post Office to send or receive items to support a business is against military regulations and German law. If you want to sell items commercially, he said, you must use the civilian postal system or a parcel delivery service to receive merchandise or send items to buyers. If you don't, you are abusing your APO privileges and evading possible taxes.

"Using your USAREUR-plated vehicle to buy or transport goods for resale over the Internet or as a part of any business is also against the law and is a common mistake made by U.S. forces personnel operating businesses," Johnson said. A USAREUR-plated vehicle may not be used, for example, to buy pottery in Poland and bring it into Germany if the pottery is to be sold in a home business or over the Internet. The gas and oil for your USAREUR-plated vehicle, and often the vehicle itself, are tax and duty-free.

That's why you can't use it to support a business or make money.

"If you buy items in non-European Union countries for resale in Germany, you can't bring them into Germany as duty-free personal property. You must stop at the border and tell German customs officials the goods are for resale," Johnson said.

Likewise, you may not buy goods in the post or base exchange, commissary or using the tax relief system (Value Added Tax form) if the goods are for resale.

Johnson added that in most cases you will also need customs clearance or tax relief paperwork if you sell property to residents of Germany who are not U.S. military members, U.S. civilian employees or family members. As members of the forces, U.S. personnel normally pay no taxes when they buy or bring their personal property into Germany, which is why clearance and the payment of the taxes is required.

People who don't follow these rules risk receiving a hefty fine and tax demand from German customs or tax authorities, and military administrative action, where applicable.

If you are planning to start a business or have doubts about your current business, contact your area support group or base support battalion commercial affairs office to go over the rules. For customs and tax tips call your local military customs office. (Courtesy of the IMA-E Public Affairs Office)

Testing

Continued from page 1

tation on driving in Germany to apply for their USAREUR driver's license," he said, adding that Soldiers will not be required to retake the written test.

"The bottom line is, we're trying to extend our services," Harrison said. The team is slated to deploy for several weeks around the end of March and early April when the bulk of local units gear up to redeploy.

"Anyone who's coming through — 1st Armored Divi-

sion, 3rd Corps Support Command and other V Corps separates — are welcome to take the test," he said. Soldiers from Germany-based units outside of the 104th ASG footprint will also be able to take the test and obtain their USAREUR license upon return to their home stations.

"We also sent 625 driver's testing booklets and videotapes downrange so that Soldiers could start studying for the test. Soldiers should check with their unit commanders in Iraq for more information about taking the test," he said.

News and features

Army to cancel Comanche development

Getting more bang for the buck for Army aviation

By Joe Burlas
Army News Service

The Army plans to cancel further research, development and planned purchases of the RAH-66 Comanche stealth helicopter.

Acting Secretary of the Army Les Brownlee and Army Chief of Staff Gen. Peter Schoomaker told the Pentagon press corps Feb. 23 the Army's Comanche termination recommendation to Congress is about getting the most bang for the buck for Army aviation.

"We have examined closely our resourcing plans for aviation and concluded that some of the capabilities those funds would provide are no longer consistent with the changed operating environment," Brownlee said.

From a purely business standpoint, it makes a lot more sense to upgrade the capabilities of the current Army aircraft fleet to meet the demands of the contemporary operating environment with the \$14 billion currently slated for the Comanche program versus getting the 121 Comanche helicopters designed for a different environment and a different enemy than the ones the Army faces today, Schoomaker said.

That \$14 billion represents about 40 percent of the planned Army aviation budget through fiscal year 2011.

The decision to cancel the Comanche program stems from one of Schoomaker's early directives to take a close look at Army aviation to determine how it should transform to best meet today's and tomorrow's challenges on the battlefield.

Standardizing what comprises an aviation brigade was one of a recent study's recommendations.

There are currently seven different types of aviation brigades in the Army. Standardization includes the Army



U.S. Army photo

Army officials have recommended to Congress that research and development of the RAH-66 Comanche stealth helicopter be terminated.

Reserve and National Guard as well as active components. The reserve component has dozens of 1970s airframes like the UH-1 utility and AH-1 attack helicopters that were phased out of the active Army more than a decade ago.

Given how reserve-component units have been tasked to support Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom in the past two years, they should be "plug-and-play" with their active-Army counterparts — but they are mostly not due in large part to equipment differences, said Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum, chief of the National Guard Bureau.

The 3rd Infantry Division's aviation brigade, recently back from Iraq, will be the first brigade to reset under the standardization plan. The future Army aviation brigades will have two battalions of 24 Apache attack helicopters each; a battalion of 30 Blackhawk helicopters; a utility battalion with eight light utility, 12 Chinook heavy utility and 12 Blackhawk helicopters and a number of unmanned aerial vehicles for reconnaissance and possibly combat; and

a maintenance battalion.

The Army plans to divert part of the terminated Comanche funds to buy more Blackhawk and Apache helicopters for the Army Reserve and National Guard.

The study also recommended that the Army replace the OH-58D reconnaissance helicopter with something more current, replace its aged cargo aircraft and create another light utility helicopter.

The Army is setting up programs to determine what the new requirements are. Part of the diverted Comanche funds will be used to buy those aircraft, said Lt. Gen. Richard Cody, deputy chief of staff, G-3.

The study and recent lessons learned identified aircraft survivability as a major issue that needs to be addressed. Money diverted from the Comanche program could upgrade a significant portion of the Army aircraft fleet with the latest flare and chaff defense systems.

Buy new and upgrade current stock

The Army plans to buy approximately 800 more aircraft and upgrade another 400 beyond what current funding allows with diverted Comanche funds.

Not all of the approximately \$6.9 billion invested in the 20-year-old Comanche program will be a loss. Technologies acquired during the development of the helicopter will be added to the Army's technology base for use in future aviation programs, perhaps the Joint Multi-Purpose Helicopter or Joint Cargo Aircraft, Brownlee said.

"If you told me six months ago that I would be standing here saying the Army no longer needs the Comanche helicopter, I wouldn't have believed you," said Cody. "It is the most flexible, most agile aircraft this country has ever produced, with leap ahead technology. The makers of the Comanche should be justifiably proud of what they have accomplished."

However, Cody said he has determined that the Comanche is a niche-capability aircraft whose funding will be better spent upgrading the current fleet.

Enlistment

Continued from page 1

just about manning units, it's also about stabilizing Soldiers, he said, referring to the fact that Soldiers under VEL would stay at their first unit for at least three years.

The Soldiers who fall under the selected job specialties will initially be assigned to the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, Fort Polk, La., which is scheduled to begin converting to a Stryker Brigade Combat Team in October.

The 2nd Cavalry Regiment is a combat unit, which is why Human Resources Command selected specialties such as infantry, cannon crewmember and cavalry scout, Garner said. Some of the non-combat-arms jobs that fall under VEL are human resources specialist, 42A; administration specialist, 42L; and supply specialist, 92Y.

"VEL will be used to man all of the maneuver brigade combat teams, including one of the brigades in the 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii. It will transform into a Stryker unit by 2005," Harris said. "Under force stabilization we will synchronize Soldiers' assignment cycles with units' operational cycles."

Most units' operational cycles are on a 36-month schedule, Harris said. Before VEL, many Soldiers already enlisted for only 36 months, but their initial-entry training took from three months to a year. So when they arrived at their unit, they were not there for a

full 36 months.

"But if you synchronize the schedules and all the Soldiers come in together, train, deploy, fight, win and return together, you will get a more deployable and ready force," Harris said.

Another example Harris cited to reinforce the push for stabilization was that Soldiers could get more familiar with their weapons. "If you're assigned an M-16 at an installation, and you're there for three years, and you take that same M-16 to the range ... you're going to be more proficient with your weapon."

Force stabilization is one of Army Chief of Staff Gen. Peter Schoomaker's 16 focus areas. "We've developed two programs under force stabilization. One is 'home-basing' and the other is 'unit focused stability,' previously known as 'unit manning,'" said Harris. Home-basing would require initial-term officers and enlisted Soldiers to stay at their first duty station for an extended tour of up to six or seven years, Harris said. VEL supports stabilization because initial-entry Soldiers report to their unit at the same time and spend at least three years at that unit.

While some force stabilization initiatives will likely begin this summer, the specific units and installations to be affected will not be announced until next month after a review of the current VEL is done by the Army.



Photo by Dennis Johnson

Getting ready to welcome Soldiers home at Hanau's Fliegerhorst Kaserne

Atlanta Bain (left) and Tiana Marratta work on a poster in a Fliegerhorst Kaserne hangar in anticipation of the homecoming of 127th Aviation Support Battalion Soldiers from Iraq later this spring. About 60 family members turned out to work on posters and banners for the returning troops Feb. 21.

Reconstruction key to well-being, safety

Jolly A. Sienda

**221st Base Support Battalion
Public Affairs Office**

Members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have seen the best and worst sides of countries including Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan and Turkey.

During a ceremony recognizing the sacrifices and service demonstrated by members of the corps and their families, employees shared their experiences, describing rugged conditions they found along the way.

Imagine a filthy rat infested ghetto with stinking trash, chemical cans strewn haphazardly, spent munition rounds, walls spattered with bullet holes, stale air and annoying insects.

"The conditions were really awful," said Capt. Edward Chamberlayne, leader of the six-person Forward Engineer Survey Team at Logistical Support Area Anaconda, Balad, Iraq.

Temperatures soared to 135 degrees.

Former Iraqi military buildings had been left to rot since the 1950s. The team was faced with many challenges to make improvements.

With the help of Iraqi contractors

who spoke fluent English they were able to communicate their desires to improve the structures.

"The dilemma was that the Iraqi engineering contractors had sufficient schooling but their current technical knowledge was years behind ours thanks to Saddam Hussein's dictatorship," he said.

The team's focus was to support the military in as many reconstruction projects as they could manage. After first arriving at the area they were only able to reach their destinations by convoy or helicopter to survey damaged buildings.

"We were lucky we were able to establish good communications with Headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in Washington, D.C.," said Fritz Ligday, a civilian project engineer assigned to the Fest-A-Team. "We had several video teleconferences via satellite communications with colleagues back in the States that assisted us greatly with the technology that we needed for the reconstruction projects downrange."

On top of their deployment to Iraq, four teams were deployed to

Mardin, Turkey, last January to set up a major supply route with gas stations and warehouses to support the American coalition in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Joni Rhiner, a civilian engineer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, was deployed to Turkey for four months. Her assignment took her to the town of Mardin, an ancient city over 8,000 years old near the Iraq/Turkey border, to locate and assess real estate properties for lease that met environmental standards for the U.S. mission.

"We were really making great progress with the Turkish people in Mardin and found appropriate real estate for the U.S. mission. Unfortunately, our jobs in Turkey were curtailed because of the political climate that occurred at that time between the United States and the Turkish government," Rhiner said.

Once the war with Iraq began, all the property that was leased, buildings that had been built for barracks

and warehouses, was all put on hold.

Shortly after that, Rhiner was deployed to Kuwait for another four months as part of the support movement for Soldiers downrange.

Working 10 hour days in severely hot conditions, Rhiner spent a lot of time in the field improving conditions for incoming Soldiers.

"We acquired air conditioners, made inspections of existing buildings, installed showers and toilets, built laundry rooms and built roads so that the Humvees and trucks wouldn't get stuck in the sand," she said.

Overall, Rhiner felt she made a difference in improving living conditions for many of the Soldiers going through Kuwait in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Matt McCullough, a civilian project engineer with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom from July 2003 through November 2003 and then to Iraq for a month during the recent holidays.

"Our mission in Afghanistan was to support the U.S. military and other countries in partnership with the United States in building and renovating barracks facilities that had been reduced to rubble," he said.

One of the buildings he was responsible for had been previously occupied by Czech soldiers in the 1960s followed by the Soviets during their Afghanistan invasion.

"We took it from the Taliban, and by then the building was riddled with bullet holes. Parts of the roof had been damaged from bombing," McCullough said. The building now houses the core training for the new Afghanistan National Army.

"We traveled daily along a route to our workplaces with the protection of the U.S. military. One Soldier who provided us protection had spent three tours in Vietnam and was a sharpshooter. His background made me feel pretty safe," he said.

There are about 18 million mines planted in Afghanistan, according to McCullough. Quite often, one

would see painted red rocks along the side of the dirt road. "This was a warning to stay away from that area because of a land mine," he said.

McCullough said he enjoyed working with people from countries all over the world while in Afghanistan. "When you met them, regardless of our cultural differences, we all felt a common purpose of pride

for our mission," he said.

Soldiers aren't the only ones serving their country in harsh conditions. Although these few employees of the Corps of Engineers have returned home, several more continue to do the work downrange rebuilding homes and buildings and improving living conditions for both coalition forces and people of various nationalities.

